



Dr. Timothy W. Thompson, CHAPLAIN

SIERRA LAW ENFORCEMENT CHAPLAINCY

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AUGUST 2008

Dear Friends,

There are some months when it seems impossible to keep up with the pace. This month has been one of those months. What makes it even more difficult is that I can't talk about what has been so demanding for me as I minister to people. I can't ask anyone to pray for the situation or discuss it with anyone. Confidentiality is something that is a huge concern for law enforcement officers. They need to know that when they talk to you, they can trust you to keep confidences. If they trust you and you inadvertently reveal private information about their lives, it can cost them their careers. Many outside of the military and law enforcement don't understand this. When you carry a weapon for a living, if your employer has any suspicion at all that you are not "fit for duty" he or she can order you to go in for a psychological evaluation or a fitness for duty evaluation. Once a "fit-for" is put in your file, you can pretty much forget about any promotions or career progression in the future.

It is a huge dilemma in law enforcement and a big systemic problem. On the one hand, everyone in the business knows what a stressful job this is -- how you witness more carnage in a year than a citizen will ever see in a lifetime. Everyone knows of the high divorce rate, suicide rate, alcoholism rate, and forced early retirement due to stress. The downside of it is that the average officer won't go get any help. The reason is what I described above. If an officer appears that he or she has a "problem," they can be ordered for a fitness for duty evaluation. That is exactly what it appears to be, a "Catch 22." You remember the movie about the soldier trying to get out of the Army on a psychological discharge. He told everyone he was crazy and the Army psychiatrist said that if he admitted he was crazy he had to be sane enough to know he was crazy thus "Catch 22." For an officer to admit that he or she has problems will more than likely lead to an evaluation at best or an Internal Affairs investigation at worse and possibly termination. That is the reason there are so many "walking wounded" in this profession who suffer from what one author in the *Army Times* calls "the invisible wounds of war."

Please keep all of our law-enforcement men and women in your prayers. For just as we have troops fighting around the world against the Global War on Terrorism, we have officers fighting a war again terrorism in their own beats. The terrorism might be spousal abuse, drug abuse, child molestation, robbery, burglary, homicide, or self-homicide (suicide). One author of a post-traumatic stress handbook edited by the Veterans Administration wrote a chapter entitled, "Law Enforcement: Peace-time Combat." Also, pray for me as I minister to these warriors of peace, men and women who go into the battle every day. I hear many of their stories and see their wounds that go all the way down to their souls. For many, I am their confidant, and I am unable to

share any of their information with anyone. This leaves me with what has been called “compassion fatigue,” a term used in psycho-traumatology that is like “burnout.” It has also been called “vicarious traumatization.” I can tell you this month has been one of those months of caring deeply for officers and offering them a heart of compassion and at the same time suffering a certain amount of emotional and spiritual fatigue. I value your prayers as I continue to minister to our law enforcement officers and citizens who have been traumatized.

It is doubly hard for me when I am called to a scene and I cannot begin to give a reason for the situation. This happened just recently when I met with the family whose only child is a 31 year-old man. He had been diagnosed with a brain tumor, and the oncologist assured the family that with some chemotherapy and radiation the young man would be back at work in six months. He was going to get married this month, however, that was not to be. The cancer took over with a vengeance, and he went downhill in a short period of time. I felt so sad for this family when I met with them in his hospital room. I looked at his fiancé and realized that I knew her. She is the teller at my bank and has waited on me many times. I prayed for this young man and was saddened when I later learned that he had died that night. I met with the family later giving spiritual and emotional support to the mother who was grief-stricken at the loss her only son. I helped them in preparing for their son's funeral service and met with the fiancé to give her spiritual support as well. It was a difficult funeral as I sought to bring God's loving presence and comfort to this family and his co-workers. This young man was loved by his friends as the crowd that turned out for his funeral was quiet large. Please keep them in your prayers as their grief seems overwhelming to them now.

In His Service,

Tim Thompson, D. Min., CTR
Chief Chaplain



PEOPLE TO PRAY FOR

- ◆ The mother and father who lost their 31 year-old son
- ◆ The 31 year-old's fiancé.
- ◆ The family and children whose husband/father died
- ◆ Those brave officers who keep the peace and protect us
- ◆ Family members who are recovering from the homicide committed on their street
- ◆ The family whose son was killed by the neighbor

◆ The neighbor who killed the neighbors relative